

Education in values and moral education in vocational colleges

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SUMMARY

On the assumption that education in values and moral education are necessary, moral competence (to make judgments) and the structure and development of the faculty of moral judgment should not be disregarded, even in the vocational education system. The main features of Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development are described as a basis for this before empirical results enable the author to make statements on the status of the moral competence to make judgments among business trainees. When fostering the moral competence to make judgments, attention should be paid in particular to certain development conditions: skilful appraisal, perceived conflicts, opportunities for communication, experience of cooperation, responsibility and opportunities to act. Information on a beneficial structuring of conditions in vocational colleges can be derived from the available empirical results on moral atmosphere in private and professional fields of action; this information is beneficial to the development of value orientation and the ability to reflect on moral matters.

Key words

Education,
moral judgment,
moral education,
moral development,
values,
developmental conditions

The necessity of education in values and moral education

Trainee Valentin is offered a bonus of EUR 150.00 by his boss if he sells a particular 'non-seller' washing machine to a customer. The trainee knows that this washing machine should no longer be sold due to environmental concerns about its high power and water consumption. On the other hand, the bonus is extremely appealing to him, because he has been saving for some time for a trip to see his friends in America, and would finally be able to afford it. What should Valentin do?

In such a conflict or a similar conflict, it is not just the decision to do something or refrain from doing so that is of interest, but also primarily the reasons for this decision, among which value orientations and fundamental moral attitudes are of great importance. They characterise human cooperation and social coexistence in all aspects of daily life. In the context of private and socio-political actions, including actions at school or college and in professional life, moral competence (to make judgments) constitutes a significant component in the genesis and control of behaviour. Therefore, particular emphasis must be placed on values and changing values as well as the structure, status and development of the faculty of moral judgment in a vocational context too. Internalised values are relatively stably acquired considerations which, as internal control quantities, act to determine and regulate behaviour, lead to selective perceptions and influence (professional) decision processes. However, objectives, values and motives are also subject to changes over time. Critical reflection on inherited value systems in an era of progressive mechanisation and specialisation as well as changed environmental and socialisation conditions are expressed in changing value structures and attitudes, especially among young people. Such a general change in social values and behaviour can be effected, for example, across a spectrum from values regarding duty and acceptance to individualism, hedonism or self-development values (Inglehart, 1977). In this case, the so-called secondary virtues, such as order, industriousness, punctuality and cleanliness, become less important, while values such as freedom, self-realisation and independence gain importance. Changing values not only give rise to generational conflicts but can also result in declining behavioural certainty and growing uncertainty about orientation.

German school legislation establishes the obligation to educate and train, considering not only qualifications and subject knowledge but also the ability to orient oneself, to find an identity and to form a graduated value system to be required (and to require support). This obligation to educate and train thus also includes moral education obligations (e.g. taking on responsibility for fellow human beings, developing a high level of moral sensibility, improving the ability to undertake moral reflection and moral reasoning), although these obligations would have to be sharply delimited and their objectives would have to be precisely worded. In view of the fact that values and moral topics/situations are constantly encountered (e.g. in social situations, with regard to environmental pollution, white-collar crime, tax evasion, the behaviour of public figures etc.), moral competence (to make judgments) and the structure and development of the faculty of moral judgment should also be moved to the foreground of school (and vocational education) work. Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development can be regarded as a basis; this theory is initially presented in the next section.

Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development

The model proposed by Kohlberg for the development of moral competence to make judgments is based on the following basic assumptions: All human beings have a cognitive instance known as 'moral reflection'. It undergoes change, which happens in stages or surges.

- These stages, according to Kohlberg (1978, p. 110; cf. also Piaget, Inhelder, 1979, p. 113 et seq.), are 'structured wholes', i.e. the individual makes consistent morally relevant judgments, that is to say judgments which are in accordance with the stage reached in each case across all situations. These stages are structurally different; the higher the stage the more differentiated the thought patterns.
- The stages are passed through in ascending order in an 'invariant sequence'. The development is irreversible. There are no regressions and it is not possible to miss out a stage.
- The stages are 'hierarchical integrations', i.e. the thought elements of a lower stage are integrated into the next highest stage, reformulated and differentiated. While arguments from a stage lower than that reached are still understood, they are rejected in principle.
- A transition between stages is triggered by cognitive dissonances, which are generated by moral conflicts. It is found that the problem can no longer be adequately or satisfactorily solved using the judgments applied hitherto.
- Finally, Kohlberg postulates that moral development is interculturally uniform. Accordingly, the development of the ability to make moral judgments progresses in the same way in all human beings, irrespective of nationality, culture and gender.

Figure 1. Summary of the stages of moral judgment (according to Kohlberg, 1978, p. 107 et seq.; see also Oser, Althof, 1992)

Pre-conventional level	Stage 1	Judgment in accordance with considerations of reward and punishment and on the basis of physical threat.
	Stage 2	Judgment according to the pattern of 'to each his own', 'tit for tat'. Belief in reciprocity.
Conventional level	Stage 3	Judgment in accordance with the 'golden rule' principle: 'Do as you would be done by'.
	Stage 4	Judgment in accordance with law and order: observance of social rights and obligations; principle of equality.
Post-conventional level	Stage 5	Stage of the ideas of the social contract, preserving fundamental rights.
	Stage 6	Stage of universal ethical principles, Categorical Imperative.

Kohlberg differentiates three levels of moral judgment, each containing two stages. These six stages are not categories of a person's character but rather an expression of an understanding of justice (see Figure 1 for a brief description of the stages).

Stage 1 is the stage of heteronomous moral thinking, which is attained approximately at the age of from 3 to 5 and in which one's own wellbeing is to the fore. The guiding criteria are punishment and obedience. Anything which brings pleasure and avoids pain, or provides a reward and averts punishment, is justified. Children profess their parents' claim to leadership to be legitimate and submit to the judgment of adults. Stage 2 is reached at around the age of 6/7. The prevalent impulses here are individualism and an objective way of thinking which is characterised by believing reciprocity to be fair. It is moral thinking determined by objective: What do I get from that? The interests of others are discerned, but one's own benefit always takes precedence. Reciprocity and fairness are the criterion for what is morally correct. This is also expressed in various figures of speech: 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours', 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!'

In contrast to the pre-conventional level with its egocentric way of thinking (stages 1 and 2), in the subsequent conventional level the viewpoints of society are taken in; society focuses its considerations on integration into reference groups or the social system within which a person lives. In stage 3, a person orients himself towards interpersonal conformity, in which mutual expectations (of roles) and relationships are important. Stage 3 thinking is primarily group thinking. A person orients himself towards the viewpoints of his specific reference groups (e.g. family, friends, colleagues). In stage 4, the specific social system within which a person lives becomes the focus of the way he thinks. Maintenance of the social order is regarded as a moral obligation. A person is guided by the law, justice and order. Specific modes of behaviour are assessed by asking the question 'What would happen if everyone did that?' The viewpoint of society is taken in here in that responsibility to society is always discerned.

At the next, post-conventional level, the sociocentric orientation of stages 3 and 4 is overcome. The matter at issue is no longer integration into reference groups or the specific social system, but rather the pursuit of generally valid and recognised values and principles. Stage 5 is the stage where moral thinking is guided by principles. It implies universal guidelines which are applied when making moral decisions for the benefit of international society in its entirety. Reasoning used at level 6 is related to humanity and the very fact of being human. A person is guided by universal ethical principles, e.g. the Categorical Imperative.

The stage of judgment at which prospective businessmen and business-women think, argue and, if appropriate, also act, is identified in the following section.

The status of moral competence to make judgments among business trainees

The investigations into the status of moral competence to make judgments ⁽¹⁾ were carried out among trainees in the insurance sector ⁽²⁾ at a commercial vocational college in Mainz (cf. Beck et al., 1996). They were carried out using questionnaires on social problems in the spheres of family, group of friends and career. ⁽³⁾

A story of conflict originating from Kohlberg, the so-called Heinz dilemma, was used as a measurement tool for the familial sphere, and served for comparison firstly with other studies of morals and secondly with the dilemmas in the other spheres: In order to save the life of his terminally ill wife, should Heinz break into a pharmacy and steal a newly developed drug which he cannot afford because the price is too high? The subject first had to decide what Heinz should do and then had to state reasons for his decision. The same also applied to the subsequent modified situations in which Heinz no longer loves his wife or the question is about a stranger instead of her.

Further dilemmas were constructed relating to the trainee's circle of friends and professional life, with the latter being divided into internal company relations and external company relations. With regard to the circle of friends, the test conflict was the question of whether Eberhard should help Florian, who, like him, is 17, to steal money from the cashier's office at their orphanage in order to enable Florian to escape from the prevailing atmosphere of strictness and paternalism there and to determine his own life from now on.

In the sphere of internal company relations, trainee Holm was faced with the problem of whether he should, just for once, comply with his boss's request to falsify the turnover statistics so that the latter can use his increased commission to help himself out of personal financial trouble. With regard to external company relations, finally, insurance trainee Weber discovered by chance that a policyholder who died as a result of a heart attack was already suffering from heart disease before the policy was taken out; should he conceal this information and pay out the sum insured or not?

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⁽²⁾ In Germany, insurance salesmen and saleswomen are trained within the dual system of professional training, i.e. each week they work in a company for 3½ days and go to vocational college for 1½ days. Companies vary in size, from relatively small insurance agencies to larger insurance groups. The training period amounts to between two and three years, depending on educational background. It ends with a final examination set by the Industrie- und Handelskammer [Chamber of Industry and Commerce].

⁽³⁾ The sample comprises a total of 140 trainees in the insurance sector who commenced their training between 1992 and 1997 and were mostly aged between 17 and 21. Some of these trainees were questioned at annual intervals on the faculty of moral judgment and morally relevant development conditions. The total numbers fluctuated with respect to the dilemmas, since not all respondents dealt with each dilemma or gave adequate, evaluable answers.

When making a diagnosis on judgment, the decisions for or against a course of action are of less importance in the respondents' answers than the reasons which in the respondents' view justify the respective decision. The significant factors in assigning arguments to a stage are the elements of the content and the social viewpoint used to judge the question. The status of moral competence to make judgments determined for the different spheres can be seen in Figure 2.

It can be seen from a glance at the classifications into stages that in conflicts within the sphere of family and friends the decisions are predominantly based on the socio-centric level of stage 3. This result, which conforms to the theory put forward by *Kohlberg* (cf. Colby, Kohlberg, 1987, p. 101), contains statements about expectations of family members and friends and reflections on duties and obligations to them which the subjects consider to be of determining importance. In the family problem, five subjects are even already arguing at stage 5; they contemplate the spirit of laws or place human rights at the centre of their considerations.

With respect to the conflicting relations within the company, the subjects' reasons for their judgments are predominantly to be classified as stage 2. The predominant thoughts here are those characteristic of this stage, concretely individualistic thoughts concerned with the equitability of reciprocity; personal advantages and disadvantages are weighed up; acceptance of a negative consequence is rejected. A quarter of answers can be assigned to stage 3, in which, for example, the expectations of colleagues or feelings of obligation towards them or the company play a role. Almost half of subjects also argue at this level in the dilemma concerning external company relations (case worker/customer); the dominant themes here are social relationships and the desire to be helpful.

If the results for the private and professional spheres are compared, on average higher stage classifications are noted in the private realm. In the private sphere, use is made principally of sociocentric reasons for judgments; the social environment and the expectations of the other members of the group play a central role in the arguments. In contrast to this, most of the subjects reflect on the decisions which they would take in the sphere of work

Figure 2. Frequency distribution of subjects' answers across the stages of moral judgment in the private and professional spheres

Area of conflict		Stages of moral judgment (according to Kohlberg; cf. Figure 1)					
		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Private sphere	family	17	49	136	1	5	-
	friends	23	48	56	2	-	-
Professional sphere	Company - internal	71	92	56	-	-	-
	Company - external	34	73	94	4	-	-

from an egocentric point of view; possible consequences of their actions for their own needs determine the moral judgment here.

The possible ways of fostering moral development shall be dealt with in the next section.

Fostering the development of moral competence

Although to date little is known about the precise transition from one stage to the next highest stage, the question arises of how a teacher can initiate moral development. It is undoubtedly facilitated or impeded by external factors. While in the view of Kohlberg (1976) opportunities to take on roles and viewpoints and confrontation with socio-moral conflicts are of primary importance, it is in particular everyday living conditions, as well as deliberate educational influences, which determine the development process for the moral competence to make judgments. The development conditions identified by Lempert as being relevant to moral development (cf. Hoff, Lempert, Lappe, 1991) are explained below (see Figure 3 for a summarising overview):

The appraisal directed at or withheld from someone identifies the quality of interpersonal relationships. This includes respect, warmth, thoughtfulness versus contempt, coldness, harshness; these influence the devel-

Figure 3. Sociobiographic development conditions for moral competence to make judgments (in accordance with Lempert)

Condition	Explanation	Subcondition	Characteristics
Skillful appraisal	Quality of interpersonal relationships, emotional attention and social acceptance	as a personality; as someone undertaking a role	skillful – detached
Perceived conflicts	Confrontation with interacting persons (groups of people) who have opposing orientations	interest v interest or interest v value or value v value	open – concealed manifest – latent
Opportunities for communication	Exchange of opinions, assertions, arguments		informal – restricted
Experience of cooperation	Type of relationship model used in decisions		participative – directive
Responsibility	Perceived assignment and attribution of responsibility	adequate	
		inadequate	expecting too much or expecting too little
Opportunities to act	Perceived leeway or restrictions	adequate	
		inadequate	expecting too much or expecting too little

opment of a feeling of self-worth and self-confidence. Advanced trust is particularly definitive with regard to greater moral development (Lempert, 1993, pp. 10-13). In this context, the differentiation as to whether someone is accepted as a whole person ('appraisal as a personality') or only on the basis of certain achievements ('appraisal as an expert or someone undertaking a role') appears important; the former is significant for the transition to the post-conventional level, and the latter for the transition to the conventional level (*ibid.*, p. 4).

In conflict resolution, the important issue is open confrontation between interacting persons with incompatible orientations. Conflicting interests, norms and/or moral concepts may arise. The frequency of occurrence and the type of conflict resolution (whether it is open or concealed) and/or the degree of verbalisation (from manifest to latent) are also of importance for the development of an awareness of moral problems.

Opportunities for communication are to be found in the exchange of morally relevant information, of opinions, assertions, arguments etc. Communicative competence can be acquired in a more informal atmosphere in which in principle all topics can be discussed openly and without sanctions. In contrast, restricted communication tolerates only a narrow field of (usually socially desirable) expressions of opinion and therefore does not foster development.

The mode of cooperation is closely related to the form of involvement in communication. It is of morally socialistic relevance here whether cooperation between persons is of a participative or directive nature. Participation means equitable team work and integration into decision processes. In contrast to this, in directive or subordinative relationship patterns decisions cannot be influenced; in fact, the individual must subordinate himself and must carry out instructions.

The assumption of responsibility is understood to mean the assignment and attribution of responsibility which is perceived to be adequate or inadequate, which influences a sense of responsibility and therefore moral competence. Demands which are appropriate to capabilities are considered to be beneficial, whereas expecting too much or too little, and lack of clarity regarding demands which have been made are believed to hinder moral development.

Opportunities to act are closely related to cooperation and the assignment of responsibility. Leeway permits the realisation of one's own beliefs and desires; it is possible to implement one's own ideas in a formative manner. This contrasts with restrictions to which private or professional actions are subject.

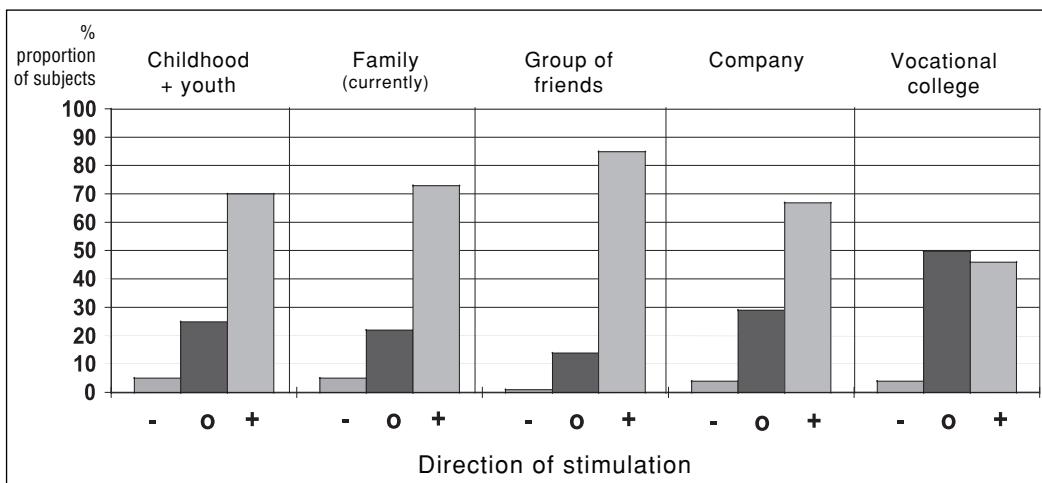
In the questionnaires used for the prospective insurance salesmen and saleswomen and the interviews carried out (cf. Beck et al., 1998), in essence two items of information were collected from each subject for each development condition in each sphere (family, group of friends, company and vocational college): 1. personal impression of characteristics and 2. in relation to this, a personal assessment of importance in each case. A combi-

nation of these data makes it possible to calculate a measured value for each condition (probability of change in moral competence to make judgments); this value varies between -1 (having a strong tendency to reversion, regression tendencies) via 0 (stabilising) to +1 (very beneficial); for the sake of simplicity, Figure 4 only differentiates between '-' (inauspicious), '0' (stabilising) and '+' (beneficial). First, the question of whether different conditions exist in the trainees' different spheres which could explain or predict the different courses of development of the moral competence to make judgments is investigated. For this overview, summarising scores were calculated for all subjects, which are intended to convey an overall impression of the stimulation potential of various spheres in order thus to gain a first perception of the milieus within which the trainees move.

Very good prerequisites for moral development are to be found in the private sphere (childhood and youth, current long-term relationship and group of friends). The situation is best among the group of friends; this is not particularly surprising, since this is the only reference group which is of a voluntary nature. The conditions discovered within companies are on average not quite so good, but nevertheless overwhelmingly positive.

The most striking feature is the profile of the vocational college, which is perceived to have the least stimulating effect on moral development of all the spheres investigated. If individual development conditions are considered, it becomes apparent that the students are not appraised on the basis of their achievements to an extent which could be described as stimulating development. However, they feel that they are accorded a degree of recognition that could have a fostering effect. Overall, regarding this condition there are fewer positive evaluations for college in percentage terms than for the other spheres. The two dimensions of 'conflicts' and 'cooperation' are largely to be described as stabilising or regressive. The situation

Figure 4. Moral atmosphere in private and professional fields of action



is slightly better, but not much better, with regard to opportunities to act. It is only communication and responsibility which are able to foster moral development.

By and large, college seems to take on more of a stabilising function. However, it is also precisely in this area that the greatest concentration of constellations which trigger regression are to be found – a result which may appear rather alarming and whose possible causes (e.g. strict structuring of syllabi, rigid organisation of lessons, time pressure, but also advanced trust, respect, social integration and recognition) merit closer investigation.

When searching for possible ways of fostering moral competence to make judgments at college, problem/dilemma discussions should be mentioned first of all. Suitable examples of these include moral conflicts and current moral problems which are independent of specific subjects, but also moral problems and conflicts which are subject-related and which present material taken from the syllabus. Restricting such discussions to religion and ethics classes is thus neither necessary nor helpful. Whereas previously the chosen method was the so-called plus-one convention, in which moral development is pushed to the stage above one's own stage by means of arguments, it is assumed nowadays that confronting people with counterarguments from the same stage as that on which they are currently to be found in moral terms is just as beneficial (cf. Oser, Althof, 1992, p. 107). The problem with which the teacher is faced, in addition to knowledge and internalisation of the theoretical principles, is that of diagnosing the status of each student's moral competence to make judgments, of paying attention to phases of transition between stages, of going into each stage and spontaneously formulating suitable counterarguments in order to trigger cognitive dissonances. Without going into the specific course of discussions of moral dilemmas here (in this respect, cf. e.g. Oser, Althof, 1992, pp. 105, 108, or Lind, 2003, pp. 83-85), various factors may be pointed out which have a beneficial effect on moral development: the type of cognitive conflict, the frequency of such discussions, good training for the teacher, good preparation for the class, the regularity of these discussions in lessons, openness to real problems, the manner in which teachers stimulate intellectual discussion, etc.

The *just community* approach can be seen as another method of fostering moral development (cf. Oser, Althof, 1992, pp. 337 et seq.). Characteristics of the just (school or college) community include various pupils' or students' committees, and also plenary meetings of teachers and pupils at which the principles of democratic rule-making and problem solving on an equal basis are practised on real-life occasions and experience of taking on responsibility and interacting in a respectful social manner is gained.

Conclusion

On the assumption that education in values and moral education is necessary and obligatory, this article first described basic theoretical principles for developing moral competence to make judgments. Examination of the status of this competence and of conditions which foster moral development revealed that factors stimulating greater moral development may be considered to include tolerance, openness, sensitivity to conflict, moral sensitivity and, all in all, a good social climate (Oser, Althof, 1992, pp. 156-159). From this, in turn, it is also possible to derive pointers for beneficial structuring of the atmosphere in a school or college which will support the development of value orientations, the faculty of judgment and the ability to undertake moral reflection.

Problems in the field of moral education include the necessity for long-term support, segmentation between different spheres of life, the real-life and everyday relevance of the material, the discrepancy between thinking and acting, and often moral hypocrisy and hidden values (a clandestine syllabus), which, along with the pedagogical activities planned for lessons, sometimes bring about an unfavourable influence. The questions arise of whether morals can be taught and what specific opportunities there are to foster the moral competence to make judgments within the educational sector. Lind (2003, p. 24 et seq.) and especially Lempert (2004) believe that morals can be fostered primarily in discussion of dilemmas and by using the *just community* approach.

Values begin to be imparted in the parental home; this process continues in kindergarten and school, and in the subsequent period of vocational training or study. Thus, parents, educators, teachers and trainers have the great responsibility of serving as role models for the personal development of children and young people. This role model function applies not only to behaviour, attitudes, outward appearance and motivation but also to dealing with social conflicts by means of argument. The requirements and expectations of companies training young people relate to characteristics including appropriate appearance, willingness to work, ability to communicate, to work in a team and take initiative, general and specialist knowledge and problem-solving abilities; they are increasingly complaining that young people lack these skills or have an inadequate grasp of them. Teachers at vocational colleges, as professional managers of their students' learning and development processes, frequently find themselves faced with a dilemma when fulfilling their educational and training remit: In view of the decreasing training budget, they have to place emphasis on vocational subject matter that is relevant to the final examination, but they should also at the same time foster general personal development, although this does not appear to be vocationally helpful and useful. Here, too, there is in reality no contradiction and there are also no conflicting objectives: Moral development can take place and values can be imparted through the medium

of professional education. The question is thus not when to take the time to deal with these objectives but rather how to structure everyday lessons so that they simultaneously serve the aims of qualification and personal development.

I would like to conclude these deliberations with a more personal remark: Engaging with morals certainly does not automatically make you a 'better' person – but it can at least make it easier to recognise what you would have to do (or not do) in order to become a better person. Using the initial dilemma faced by the trainee Valentin, everyone may determine for himself which possibility he would choose and why. Finally, the following saying of George Bernhard Shaw can serve as a challenge not just for teachers who are role models but also for all of us:

*The best reformers the world has ever seen
are those who commence on themselves.*

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